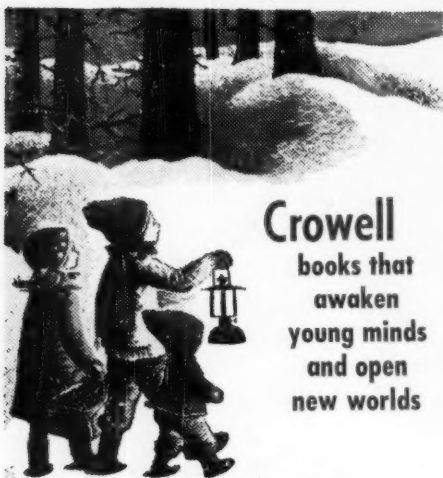


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# child study

By-lines

A quarterly journal of parent education

Winter 1954-55

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In her thoughtful article on helping children develop controls, SELMA FRAIBERG draws on knowledge and understanding gained from long and intimate contact with children and their problems. An instructor in the Department of Psychiatry, Wayne University College of Medicine, she is also a child therapist and an author.

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MARGARET C. DAWSON is the Editor of CHILD STUDY magazine.

The cover photograph is by MARGARET W. FERGUSON.

## What have we learned about sex education?

Educators have been called on to face some disappointments in what a generation of "frank" and "sane" sex education has actually accomplished. How far, they are asking themselves, has this education relieved children of troubling fantasies? Are relations between the sexes more wholesome as children grow into adolescence? Are parents more relaxed and understanding about children's questions and behavior related to sex? These are some of the things we hoped sex education would accomplish.

Looking around us we are forced to admit that we still see neurotic behavior, still see sex abnormality, still see unhappy marriages among the very people who were presumably exposed in childhood to sounder and fuller information about sex than were their predecessors.

But this does not mean that we have been altogether on the wrong track or that we should revert to old fashioned ways of refusing to help youngsters with their normal search for information, and with their preoccupations and worries. It means that we must acknowledge that the problem is more complex than we first thought, that we must make better use of what we do know and extend our knowledge of how emotional attitudes develop and are modified. Merely giving children the facts of life, or even "wholesome attitudes" through words and explanations, has proved insufficient. In addition, we must become more aware that the sex relationship is merely one aspect of human relations; to be understood, it must be related at all times to a particular culture—in our case, that of our modern Western society. The very word "sex" carries meanings for us today which would not only surprise an Asiatic or a Navajo Indian but would be unfamiliar to our own pioneer ancestors.

These changes in the meaning of "sex" and some of the confusions, too, that have arisen concerning the realities of sex behavior in this country have been well stated in a recent book on sex education:

"... For many people in the United States today, sex means worry and embarrassment. It is a puzzle, a problem,



uncomfortably accepted and uneasily explained to others.

"Why so? Probably there are many answers. Certainly one would seem to be our background—the stern views of our grandparents, and theirs before them, that sex was wickedness and a sin of the flesh. These views have died slowly. Times have changed, of course. The old ways are perhaps losing their power to keep us from expressing ourselves sexually. But they can still make us feel guilty for doing so.

"There is evidence of confusion and uncertainty in the vastly different attitudes we have toward different parts of our sex life. We like and admire the sexy glamor boys and girls of our movies, TV and books, and yet we disapprove of youngsters or adults who behave the same way 'in real life.' We believe in lasting marriages, and yet we have a high divorce rate. We like to think we are wise and up-to-date in our ideas about sex, and yet we are often fumbling, tongue-tied and untruthful in the way we prepare our youngsters for the sexual side of life. We have too many tots whose natural interest in sex is discouraged. Too many tense little grade-school girls worried about menstruation. Too many adolescents baffled and upset by the surging changes going on within their bodies. Too many emotionally-childish adults. Too many parents passing on the mistakes of their own sexual upbringing to their children coming along.

"This is not a happy picture, to be sure. But it is not a hopeless one, either. As a reflection of the capacity to love, sex is an endless opportunity. Giving love openhandedly and receiving it trustingly are possibilities for everyone who seeks them."\*

**C**onvinced of this "endless opportunity," and of the human cost when it is missed, CHILD STUDY turns here to an examination of some of the gains and mistakes we have made to date in the sex education of our children. In this issue, we offer a few more contributions from people who know children well and who are aware, too, of parents' own concerns. These articles do not pretend to give definitive answers, but we hope they may shed a little more light on this difficult subject.

\* This editorial comment by Adie Suehsdorf is taken from *Facts of Life for Children* by The Child Study Association of America. Two editions: Maco, 50c (available from CSAA); and Bobbs-Merrill, \$2.75.

This straight-from-the-shoulder talk is by the author of the books "Children Who Hate" and "Controls from Within" whose informal style and incisive approach have kept his previous articles for Child Study in continuing demand by parents

## Sex education: unfinished business

By Fritz Redl

There are plenty of good books and articles on what we know about sex education, but a book could be written also on what we don't know. Questions as to just where we stand today and what we still have to learn are challenging ones. But all I can do in an informal little discussion like this, is to think out loud about what bothers me most about the problem at this very moment. Remember: this is *not* a scientific compendium of present-day knowledge about sex, it does *not* promise to solve your problems with Junior. I don't pretend even that what I have to say is "new." But, I repeat, these are the things that bother me plenty.

### *The devil at the backdoor*

What the "enlightened adult" of 1954 is proudest of in this field is that we have cast behind us a lot of the Hell-and-Brimstone approach to sex curiosity and sex behavior in growing children, and have certainly become aware that it doesn't help to scare them and adopt a punitive attitude. In fact, we are even convinced that kids with quite obvious problems in that line, while in need of advice and control, are more helped by encouragement, reason and moral support. Unfortunately, this changed attitude does not hold for all age groups of children. As so often happens, the old

primitive "devil" manages to smuggle himself back into the picture, often by the backdoor of the very ritual which was originally meant to exorcise him. In this case, the devil has crept back through two backdoors, really.

One is the concept of "traumatic experiences." Years ago, psychiatry discovered the importance of the fact that occasionally a single unfortunate experience might have the power to "fixate" people on an earlier development, or to cause all sorts of hocus pocus in the human soul that is hard to get rid of later. This concept is still a good one, and we have all been made aware of the fact that many adult neuroses or other mental afflictions may be traced back to something that happened in early childhood. But we have learned a few additional facts of life since this concept was first introduced. The general public, picking up psychiatric terminology at the original source, often forgets to note later modifications in the picture. Thus, we know now that the concept of "traumatic" experiences is not meant to be quite as rigid as it sounds. For some people have undergone exactly what for others was "traumatic," yet show little lasting ill effect. Some have even drawn later character strengths from what originally might have been expected to break their backs. We have learned that such

things as the culture, value system and the subcultural background in which things happen have a lot to do with determining whether or not an experience will be traumatic: we need to learn a lot more about what is normal for Johnny where *he* lives, before we can be sure what a given experience will do to him.

Unfortunately, while the modern psychiatrist is quite aware of this, the public likes its borrowed concepts nice and rigid, and is liable to stick to its old guns. We no longer make the *kids* afraid that a doubtful sex experience will wreck them for life. But we have got the parents scared stiff that Johnny might be doomed to become a homosexual just because he was involved in some smutty incident in the schoolyard. It would be silly, of course, to just pass lightly over the possibility that an experience may have "traumatic effects," especially if it is accompanied by feelings of helplessness, anxiety and guilt. The answer is not a vain "either-or" of terror or irresponsible dismissal, but recognition that more organized research is needed. What really is the truth about this, for the nation at large? And how can we help the parent in doubt to assess the meaning and impact of a specific incident with a specific child? No wonder youth complains we don't give them answers that are definite enough to offer guidance. How can we, as long as we indulge in either-or battles instead of making a constructive attack on the basic problem at hand?

The other backdoor, through which the "devil" of Hell-and-Brimstone fear of sex comes into the picture, is a door that leads right into the science and social science classrooms of our schools. There, too, of course, the sly old devil uses the smartest disguise. What, to cover a superstitious belief, could be better than scientific terminology? But in giving children good scientific information we sometimes disguise our own motives. Of course, nowadays, nobody would want to "wipe out" the sexual urge in his child or try to squash it with shame and fear. But are we really

acting so differently if we try to squash it with semantic antics and scientific terms? Isn't a good deal of our talk about the importance of "sex information" and a "good, clean scientific vocabulary" based on the secret hope that we can somehow "educate" sex feelings out of our kids? I wouldn't be surprised if many children heard not what the adult was saying about reproduction, etc., but heard instead another voice saying something like this: "Listen, none of this sex stuff for *you*, understand? Of course it is perfectly all right to *know* about such things, or to name them—provided Latin is the main language used for such nomenclature. So I'll give you all the correct terms and the slides and anatomical charts, even movies. But you must promise in return not to grin or smirk or giggle or smile. And of course, none of that sexy stuff at all. If you promise to drop all sex *emotions* right here and now, that Encyclopedia of Sexual Research on the shelf is all yours . . ."

I hope I will not be misunderstood. I am all for sex education, in appropriate form and at the developmentally right time. I am not complaining that we have too much of that. On the contrary, we have much too little. But I am complaining that the old devil of "scare the sex out of them" is apt to sneak back into our best efforts in the guise of enlightened "matter-of-fact" talk. Sex information about the facts of life is needed because knowledge is important in itself, and because ignorance is the worst block in the way of reason and control. It is meant to *aid* in the development of healthy sex attitudes, not to *substitute* for them.

#### **Our greatest enemy: the stereotype**

We have, on the whole, become quite reasonable in our approach to the sexual development of the younger child. (Of course, I'd rather you didn't force me to define just whom I mean by "we" at the moment, or to count the number of people who should be included in such a concept.) But we still have trouble with the adolescents. Certainly some of our worries are

justified and realistic. That is so obvious I hope I can skip over it lightly without being misinterpreted. Of course some of the consequences of sexual behavior are more threatening when the youngster's body approaches physiological maturity, and his actions are subject to much less parental control. Granting this, I still want to point out that we are getting to be quite irrational in our collective reaction to the problem of teenage sex. No matter how much we may love our own youngsters or those entrusted to our care, the moment we talk collectively with the voice of "The Adult," the youngster becomes "The Teenager," and from then on it is clear that we think he is not to be trusted, and that the only thing that stops him from acting out his terrible sex impulses is the watchful stare of the adult. There is another stereotype, of course, for stereotypes always come in sidepieces, like chimney decorations in a Victorian home. That is the illusion of the "nice, all-round kid," the real, red-blooded, sport-enthusiastic, "clean-cut" boy. All this boy is allowed of sex is the anatomical fact that he is a boy. Beyond that much concession to nature, he is not supposed to be interested in anything but plane models, baseball and bottle-top collections. The female counterpart to this stereotype can easily be drawn by the reader.

What disturbs me about this naive illusion of the black-and-white drawing is that it prevents us from giving solid guidance to the kids when they need it. When some kids become open sex problems, we are liable to get so disgusted and confused that we exclude them from the channels of therapy and inclusion into adult life which they so badly need, while with the kids who seem to fit into the stereotype of the all-round boy we miss the boat because we don't feel right in assuming that they, too, have emotions and fantasies. Their adult sex life is supposed to just "pop out of nowhere," ready-made, so to say, with no trouble to us at all. Obviously, this is not the way the child grows to be a man or woman. How, then, in the face of our many

mistakes do so many of them manage the transition with pretty fair success?

#### ***The kids themselves do the job***

To answer that, I think we must first ask some other questions:

1) With all the trouble with sex problems and delinquency, is it true that the majority of youth is ending up as sex fiends or perverts?

*Answer:* No, nonsense. It is too bad that we only count the deviates, and make no scientifically valid count of the normal youngsters. The majority of our youth, as the population figures show, seems to become quite capable of producing offspring, and while a lot may be wrong in the daily life of many families, only a few of the parents break out into serious violence.

2) Is most youth given adequate sex education at the time when they need it most?

*Answer:* No. Most schools do not face the problem at all, and most adults, even if they want to meet the sex education needs of the youngsters, *get there many years too late.*

3) If this is so, where do all the *well adjusted adults* of this generation come from? If, as we well know, the adult generation is far from taking adequate care of sexual knowledge for youngsters and their introduction into the mysteries of love, who does the job?

*Answer:* The other kids.

I know this sounds absurd, for isn't it a well known fact that the kids tell each other the wrong things, that they often abuse the innocence of their age mates and that the worst and filthiest stuff comes from what "that other kid told mine"? Granted. But, where does the good information come from, and the emotional relief of ignorance lifted and anxiety assuaged? *It, too, comes from the other kids.* In most people's lives there was not only another kid who told them the wrong stuff or teased them mercilessly about their ignorance. There also was one—or the neighborhood group—that had mercy upon them and told them what they obviously needed to know. And the

mere fact that in informal group bull sessions even a frightening and shameloaded subject may seem silly, funny, or at least less fearful, must be counted as one of the "preventive psychiatric measures" which nature provided long before we invented "Group Therapy." In short, I really mean to insist: the major job of preventive psychiatry around sex knowledge and the sex life of our youth is being taken care of by youth itself. The real psychiatrists for our children are the peer groups. Obviously there are silly or dishonest or exploitative "peers" and "peer groups" in our communities. But why count only these, and not look at the terrific marvel of the fact that, by and large, the peer group of the American child, without any guidance or training, and certainly with no help from adult society, is doing a passable job?

I don't insist that this is as it should be. Of course not. The "peer group" of the present-day adolescent world is as much in turmoil and confusion as the world of adults — how could it help but be? It is not a good idea to relegate a job as important as the sex education of youth so much to chance. So it is time that the adult generation take the task seriously and produce adequate youth guidance on all levels. We might even learn much from a survey in which we tried to find out from youngsters how they have answered the sex questions of other youngsters, and what experiences they themselves remember as recipients of such help.

#### **Why not more confidence in Confidence?**

We have done a lot of "parent education" on the sex issue over the last twenty-five years. Besides giving helpful aid, there is no doubt that we have also sometimes messed things up a bit. In trying to "unscare" parents about the sex life of their children, we have inadvertently made some of them too light-hearted and unconcerned about youth's need for guidance. On the other hand, I think we have made other parents feel so responsible for giving sex education to their children that they con-

stantly fear they have not done enough or have not done it in just the right way.

Among the insecurities we have helped produce in the present parent generation there is one especially which I would like to single out for attention here. That is the frequent confusion about the meaning of "confidence." The fact is, that the conscientious, psychiatry-loyal parent of today has a terrific need to be sure that his son or daughter develops enough "confidence" in him to share all secrets, including the most intimate problems of sex. This attitude is understandable, because many conscientious parents themselves have gone through times of worry and confusion in their youth when they could not find any adult worthy of their confidence. The problem we are running into now looks something like this: in order to confide in one's parents — so we argue — about a delicate matter like sex, one must have a lot of confidence, a really deep "rapport" with them. True. But many parents now turn this insight around or overstretch it. What, then — so they argue — if my son or daughter does *not* ask me questions about sex, does not choose *me* as the one to turn to for such advice? This, they fear, would be proof positive that they didn't "mean anything" to their child. Why should "my own flesh and blood" turn to that "stranger," or that teacher in school, they ask, especially after I "have done everything always to let him know I love him"? In short, the ambitious parent of today is liable to tremble at the idea that his son's or daughter's sexual problems might be brought to other people, or that kids might go through phases where verbal help is not sought from the parental adult at all.

Fortunately, we know it isn't necessary for the parent to feel so disturbed about this situation. It is well known that sometimes children go through a phase in which direct communication about sexual issues is the hardest to achieve with the people they love the *most*. So, many children turn to their peers or another adult friend or a book, not because they have no confidence



in their parents but because they feel so strongly and positively toward them that, in this area, the "homegrown adult" is, for the time being, "taboo."

Parents are confused about the very concept of "confidence" itself. "Confidence," as referred to in this connection, is clearly based on some especially positive and intimate relationship of a child to an adult. But relationships can be manifold, and people have different types of relationships to different people, with much overlapping. Some children, for instance, like their psychologist. They have so much "confidence" in him that even matters hard to discuss are easily unpacked before him and put into his lap. At the same time, this psychologist suddenly turning up at camp, or taking the kid to a department store, may find himself amazed at how little influence he has on other than the "let's-share-a-secret" type of situation in the youngster's life. Even while he is with his most trusted "psychologist," Bobby may raise such mayhem in that department store that both of them get themselves bounced in no uncertain terms. At the same time, I have found children with terrific emotional affection for a teacher or camp counselor, and with a real "trust" in their judgment in direct life situations. Although these children would never dream of divulging to that beloved counselor what they have just confided to their psychologist in their last clinical interview, they would stop being unmanageable and would come down off the roof in a minute if the counselor said to.

The moral of all this is that it is not true that, just because a child likes you, *all* the avenues of his life will be open to you. Some children will, on the basis of their love and trust, open up to you the avenue of shared secrets, and will drop the barrier of shame and guilt. Others will open to you the avenue of "power over my actions," and will do things you demand without fear of loss of face. *Both* cases may imply that the child has "confidence" in you. Also, we know that with adolescent youngsters, very often the areas and ways in which they

allow you an "in" on their lives shift rapidly.

I think it is important to remember this: partly so that parents need not feel guilty unnecessarily, just because at a certain phase somebody else is a more "logical" relationship-carrier in matters of sexual guidance; and partly because this confusion about "confidence" is often the cause of unwarranted jealousy between school and home. Many parents are afraid of asking the educator, physician, psychiatrist in for help on the sex education of their children, not because they really think they can handle all of it alone, but because they are afraid that to call for assistance would reflect on them and their ability to win the child's trust. Getting rid of this illusion ought to make teamwork easier among all those who are needed in Johnny's or Mary's life.

#### ***Are you so sure this was really "sex"?***

It is interesting to notice how often there is a great difference between what the experts say and what the general public hears them say; and, even more baffling, how much of what experts say the general public entirely refuses to hear. It sometimes takes a few generations for these discrepancies to disappear.

Take just one of the smaller items out of the discoveries of Sigmund Freud. He sure said loud enough for everybody to hear, how often fantasies or feelings connected with sex may be involved even in seemingly "harmless" behavior, where the bare eye of the layman might not expect to find such "hidden content" at all. The public heard that one all right. What Freud and all his disciples have *also* said, however, still seems to remain quite unheard: namely, that sometimes it can be the other way around. The obviousness with which sex is involved in a given piece of behavior may be striking, yet the real problem in many such instances *may lie somewhere else*. Over the years, I have been called into many school situations where a group of pre-adolescents had been caught in some form of sex play or other. It seemed to the



authorities that those cases would naturally need sex counseling or might have to be referred for special treatment because of evidences of homosexuality or other perversion. In many of those cases it was soon obvious, though, that "sex" was only the surface reason for the behavior. The real problem lay elsewhere. Many of the little boys caught in what seemed to the adults the purely sexual act of mutual masturbation were in reality primarily reassuring themselves about their eligibility to run with an "older and tougher group," accepting this ordeal as a social initiation rite, with great strain, guilt, shame and disgust. The literature of psychiatry is also rich in description of cases of prostitution among adolescent girls where "sex" actually was the minor point — it was a weapon used in the revenge battle against a rejecting or overstrict home. In my work in the field of juvenile delinquency, I run time and time again into the "hardened case" of the supposed sex delinquent who blackmails or forces other youngsters into participation in his sexual acts.

No doubt there are plenty of youngsters with severe sex perversions produced by disorganized family and neighborhood life. Yet some of these youngsters are neither genuine perverts nor oversexed. What is wrong with them is their total lack of *control* over their impulses, and their exploitative outlook on life, which makes any pleasurable act okay, irrespective of the feelings of another person forced into it. The real damage to their personality lies in the indecency of their basic philosophy of life, and/or the absence of any feeling for "people." They need therapy, to be sure, but it is to their *brains* and their *hearts* that the therapy should be directed, not to their genitalia.

The deafness of the public to this important difference between the surface or overt behavior as compared with the basic personality factors really involved, is probably one of the most disastrous sources of failure in the proper guidance of the youth of today. Because of it, we are apt to apply

effort in the wrong place, and miss the boat not only with the disturbed youngster, but with the normal one as well.

#### **Sometimes "experts," too, need help**

There are a few facts of which we — now I mean those of us in the fields of sex education, child development, psychology and psychiatry — also should be reminded. Among them is one which was brought home to me several years ago, when I was busy running a Treatment Home for particularly wild and uninhibited specimens of the pre-teenage generation. These kids were anything but physically overdeveloped; they had not even come close to the actual physiological stages one usually associates with puberty proper. However, their exposure, from early years of life on, to all the details and pathology of an open-door neighborhood sex life, had made them rather peculiar in their outlook on sex. In a way, they were extremely "corrupt" as far as knowledge and sex terminology went, and the only reason I knew they hadn't read books on sex pathology was because they couldn't read. On the other hand, they had a deep need, from time to time, to go back and try to live out very early childhood attitudes which normal children get behind them before the end of their nursery school years. The result of this was that I often was confronted with the sudden eruption of wild sexual behavior under conditions and in places where it obviously could not be afforded, even though much of what they did actually was quite "harmless" from the psychological standpoint.

Whatever the details, the problem at the moment was one of finding ways to "stop that nonsense right now" without, at the same time, creating any feeling in their distortion-eager minds, that we were opposed to sex, thought them depraved, or wanted to make them guilty or scared, and without contributing to their outlook on sex as just so much smut anyway. I sought, at that time, advice on this matter from many sources — after I had exhausted what I thought I knew myself and had learned

from experience with such children over the years. This is the amazing thing I ran into at that time: I found all sources of advice most helpful in pointing out *why* those children might act the way they did. I also found these people most helpful when discussing just what we must "by all means avoid" so as not to add to the problem or create secondary trauma in those children. In fact, I found them so helpful because they all pointed out to me what I already knew. It seemed, however, they were as stuck as I was when it came to the question: how, while avoiding damage to the kids, am I going to *stop* them acting in this way before the cops come and cart them off to jail?

The despair in which I found myself has since given rise to my fervent interest in developing research into an "instrumentology" of techniques of interference in child behavior, and I think this is needed on all fronts of the educational scene. Especially in the area of sex education, however, this experience has brought me up against one of the most serious gaps in our present equipment: we know a lot about the causes of sexual misdevelopment, about the nature of normal sexual development (though not quite as much) and we are beginning to learn about the techniques for long range therapy for severe deviates. But as yet we know little to say when a sincere mother asks us: but what am I to do *right now*?

Fortunately, practice is, in this area, way ahead of theory and research. Most experienced specialists will be stunned by the abstract question, but when you fill in for them the details about a certain child and a certain experience, they usually come through with the goods and deliver better than we really have a right to expect.

**Let's start where we are—but where are we?**

Plenty of amazing progress has been made during the last few decades not only in our actual knowledge about children and sex, but also in the spread of more enlightening attitudes among parents and in schools. The things we know best, and that have been

learned by the largest number of adults, could be listed as follows:

Many more people take a more serious interest in the task of sex education for their children. We have learned a lot about what is to be considered "normal" in the development of sexual curiosity and sex behavior, certainly for the very young child. We have tried many techniques of sex information and sex education talks, and in the process of doing so have got over most of the silly and strained efforts to find *the* "answer."

We have learned to consider more carefully just which of many approaches might be best for a particular child. We have learned that sex enlightenment, as well as sex education, is a task spreading into as many developmental phases as the child goes through, rather than something to "be got over with when he is five or fifteen." We have relaxed in our reaction to much child behavior which used to scare us, and at the same time most of us have got over jumping from an over-anxious and over-moralistic rejection of sex into an equally naive illusion that all sex problems would be solved if parents only made a nudist camp out of their home, or if kids were only allowed to act out their impulses.

We have come to realize in some degree that many things about sexual growth, like the gradual development of sex roles, are quite as important to understand as masturbation and menstruation. We now see that during transitional ages, especially in early adolescence, kids may have trouble "accepting their masculinity or femininity," and that such transitional growth pains are quite different from the real McCoy of homosexuality or perversion. We even have begun to listen to Kinsey who tells us that a lot of the sexual experimentation which we previously relegated to textbooks on sex pathology, is "gone through" by a much larger number of later quite normal adults than we realized.

Most of this—and a great deal more that would take too long to list here—can be taken for granted at this time, though it

seems that quite a lot of people are taking an awfully long time to learn what "we" think "we know" in this day and age.

Where do we go from here? There is plenty yet to be done. In fact, the list would get so long it would bust the framework of this little study wide open. Therefore, let me restrain myself and limit this to only three out of at least twenty-five possible points:

*Point 1:* We still know — and search — much too little for knowledge about the problems of the adolescent and older youth. In fact, most of the books on direct sex education which are addressed to youth and which have any claim of being frank and talking turkey are for the very young age. We don't dare to talk turkey and be frank with the older kids. Why?

*Point 2:* Our thoughtfulness about, and tolerance of, some unavoidable, "developmentally quite harmless" sexual behavior in kids stops around the 7th grade or so. Sex discussions from then on are definitely scary to the adult, and we don't really know what to say or do. For a while we fool ourselves by telling them in adolescence what they wanted to know six years before — a process which gives us the illusion that we are providing "sex education" in some of our schools. But we are still quite ill-equipped to handle even the questions, to say nothing of the challenge for action-advice, of the older kid.

*Point 3:* Our thoughtfulness about, and opinion that we are in danger of infecting youth with our own cowardice. The teacher who assists a kid in a rough sex problem still sticks her neck way out and is liable to be fired. The principal who allows too much advice to be given, or sex education to go on in his school, has to tremble in his boots every day even in the most "enlightened" community, since the effect of any crank objection is still terrific. This goes so far that we are even afraid of practicing what we know, because we can't afford to "take a chance." Many a coeducational program, for instance, which would dissolve pathological tensions in a given school in

no time, can only be "risked" with children who are very young. As long as the boys are so little that they want only to tease girls anyway, or the girls so big that they would despise these younger boys to begin with, coeducational programs are "safe." But at the time when they really begin to need each other in order to learn how to live with each other, we aren't so keen on it any more. Sometimes, too, we hesitate to help a kid who has developed a somewhat shady reputation, even though we know what he needs, because his rehabilitation might not be successful. We accept the fact that people sometimes may die even in a well planned operation, but we have no tolerance if a case of sex therapy backfires even a little bit.

#### **Courage—in conviction and research**

The answer to all this? More courage of our convictions, even the ones that don't happen to be popular. And more research — for, even with courage, how can we tell youngsters what they need to hear before we know what that really is?

Thus, in essence, the problem of sex development of the youth of our day is really a problem of the morale, brains and stamina of the adults. Usually, an adult generation has the types of problems with its youth which it deserves. If we got together more on our own confusions about "values" as well as about psychologically correct procedures, we wouldn't find it quite so hard to face the problems with our kids.

#### **UNICEF greeting cards**

For the sixth successive year, UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) offers greeting cards for sale, the proceeds to go to the underprivileged children of the world who are helped by the Fund. The designs of five cards, which come in boxes of ten (two of each design), were contributed by Roger Duvoisin who has illustrated so many beautiful children's books. An unusual photograph, in color, of the United Nations building, was also contributed by Erwin Blumenfeld. These, like the Duvoisin series, come in boxes of ten, at \$1.00 per box. Order from UNICEF Greeting Card Fund, United Nations, N.Y.

# Helping children develop controls

Healthy sexual development in a child calls on the parent for different kinds of understanding at different stages

**I**t is only yesterday that we learned how certain parental attitudes toward the sexual behavior of children might seriously affect the mental health of the child and cause shame and anxiety which could cripple the sexual functions in later life. We learned that masturbation, sex play and the sexual curiosity of children were not the early outcroppings of perversion but the normal expressions of sexuality in children.

We must admit that in our revolution in child care we have seriously neglected the plight of the good and conscientious parents who understand and appreciate the normality of sexual manifestations in childhood but who feel, with some justification, that sexual behavior, like any other behavior, may require reasonable limitations. These parents complain that we have had a lot to say about what not to do and very little to say on what to do.

The dilemma of the enlightened parent is described very well in the following story: The mother of a six-year old, Tommy, overheard her son when he invited his girl friend Polly up to his room to look at his picture card collection. The mother, wincing at this nursery version of a male gambit, heard them go upstairs and close the door. She recalled with discomfort that

only a few weeks ago Polly's mother had found the two children engaged in toilet games in the back yard and had sent Tommy home with a stern warning. Tommy's mother wondered uncertainly what to do. After a discreet interval she went upstairs. She approached the door of Tommy's room, fumbling for the right words in such a moment. Her knowledge that ill-chosen words might be harmful in such a situation caused her to discard one idea after another. She was not even sure that in this day and age such interference was a parental prerogative. Finally she knocked and said, "May I come in?" Her son replied with something inaudible, and she opened the door. Tommy and Polly exhibited great poise considering that both were in partial undress. The mother, clutching for a neutral phrase, found herself saying, "Don't you children feel chilly?" And the answer, truthful as George Washington's, bounced back upon her swimming consciousness: "No."

It is true that the mother's uncertain handling here led to an impasse, but no harm was done. It was probably better that Tommy's mother let him know that she knew about these games than to pretend ignorance. For in spite of the splendid aplomb which Tommy demonstrated when his

mother came upon his secret games with Polly, he was ashamed and worried about these games, as his mother found out later. He was relieved to know that his mother knew about his secret and that, unlike Polly's mother, she did not think such things were shameful and bad. Tommy, like so many children, had almost arranged this situation so that mother would "find out."

At the same time, Tommy's mother wants to get something more than simple reassurance across to him, for he is at an age when he can be helped to understand that there are other ways in which he can satisfy his sexual curiosity than through the games that little children play. I think it would have been possible for Tommy's mother to handle the incident in Tommy's room by simply asking to come in, quietly suggesting that the children get dressed and find something else to do, then talking with Tommy later and privately about the incident. Here, the mother could get across the idea that it was natural for children to be curious about how a boy was made and how a girl was made but that Tommy would find that he could not get the answers to his questions by looking and playing games. He could ask Mother and Daddy all the questions he wanted so they could help him figure it out. In this way Tommy would not be made to feel ashamed and frightened; on the contrary, he would be relieved. His normal and necessary curiosity would not be destroyed, since other means for its satisfaction would be offered.

#### ***Drawing their own conclusions***

Because we have sometimes neglected the practical problems of sex education, many serious and well-intentioned parents have been left to draw their own conclusions from the body of knowledge which we have assembled on childhood sexuality. In the belief that secrecy may lead to attitudes of shame, many parents have sacrificed their privacy and have permitted children to observe them nude, to come into the bathroom, or to take showers with them, believing that such openness and

frankness would encourage healthy attitudes toward the human body and its functions. Yet our observations of children who have been reared in such permissive homes have shown that this freedom produces its own varieties of guilt and anxiety in a child; that, paradoxically, too much freedom produces a conflict closely resembling that which results from too much restriction.

Some time ago a father asked my opinion on the handling of a problem with his four-year-old daughter. She asked repeatedly to visit him in the bathroom, showed her interest in her father's penis and asked to touch it. Should he allow this? His wife felt that if this action satisfied the child's curiosity it should be allowed. "But I don't mind telling you," the father said challengingly, "that I find this embarrassing." I realized that the father had expected I would support the view that this kind of exploration should be permitted. He was really very much surprised and relieved when I told him that I didn't think it was necessary or good for his little daughter to satisfy her curiosity in this way.

#### ***Why restrict curiosity?***

But if we restrict the child's curiosity, if we interfere with these manifestations of sexuality, won't the child feel that there must be something secret and shameful about such things? There need not be, of course. If we are alarmed and shocked by this curiosity, if we make threats, we might certainly create unnecessary feelings of shame in the child. But suppose the father who sought my opinion were to say this to his little daughter: "I know that all children are curious about how grownups are made and how fathers are made. But grownups like to be alone sometimes, just as children do. If you want to know how grownups are made you can *ask* me and you can ask Mommy and we'll explain it to you. So tell me what it is you want to know."

Now such an answer would accomplish several things. We acknowledge the child's



right to be curious. We have not said that her wish is dangerous or bad, but we have asked her to put her curiosity into words, as a substitute for looking and examining. We have denied her the privilege of an intimacy with father but we have not denied her the right to be curious and to ask questions.

But why should we not have permitted the child to have her wish to look and to touch? Because we have learned that such intimacies with a parent are very exciting to a child. To give in to the child's wish does not satisfy her curiosity but does, in fact, encourage her little-girl fantasies of an intimacy with father, of doing something with father which is like her fantasy of what mother does. Since all children feel guilt about such wishes, their gratification would only increase her anxiety without really diminishing her curiosity.

#### **Stages and ages are important**

So much of what we do and say in relation to the sexual behavior of children depends upon the age of the child and type of sexual behavior. A type of behavior which is "normal" or "typical" for one stage of development, is not appropriate for another. Our evaluation of the behavior and our methods of handling it will be different for different stages of development. Let us take an example:

If a three-year-old boy in nursery school finds it fascinating to observe how little girls urinate we would consider this a normal expression of interest in sexual differences; that is, *normal for his age*. Our method of handling such interest in nursery school children is to allow natural observations during the toileting time. Normally this type of interest subsides so that in school-age youngsters it will take the form of some giggling and joking about toilet functions but a diminished interest in direct observation. But suppose our three-year old cannot give up his fascination with looking, and at the age of nine creates a problem in his summer camp by his insistent and repetitious peeking into the

girls' lavatories. We would no longer consider this activity appropriate for his age, and we could assume that the persistence of this infantile form of sexual curiosity was rooted in a personal problem.

If we applied the same methods of handling to the fascinated looking of the nine-year old as we apply to such curiosity in the three-year old we would offer no solutions to the nine-year old's problems. For with the three-year old we can operate on the assumption that normal opportunities to make observations will satisfy the need for looking, especially when this is combined with answers to the child's questions. But with the nine-year old, looking does not satisfy the curiosity, as we can see from the persistence of this behavior. His looking is motivated more by anxiety than curiosity. It is as if he could not believe his eyes and must look again and again. We would be doing both the nine-year old and his fellow campers a disservice if we were to treat these incidents in the same way that we would in nursery school; that is, by providing opportunities for looking. The camp staff would be correct in not allowing this behavior, in placing realistic limits as kindly and firmly as possible. If we are to help the child with his problem, we must seek its meaning rather than try to provide outlets for its expression.

Similarly, we recognize that masturbation means different things at different ages. Two- and three-year olds are sometimes very casual in the ways in which they handle themselves. In games or in quiet periods the hand may stray to the genital region and the child seems quite unconcerned about the presence of adults or other children. It is usually unnecessary to comment on this to very little children. As the child grows older he tends to restrict his occasional masturbation to moments when he is alone. We consider this a normal development which goes along with the child's growing social sense. We support this realization by the child that masturbation is a private affair, not because it is shameful or bad, but because it is one



of a number of things which are regarded as private acts. In a school-age child frequent and open masturbation or touching of the genitalia would not have the same meaning as the casual handling of the toddler. The persistence of this type of masturbation in the older child may indicate some unresolved anxieties which require our attention.

When it comes to helping the pubertal child handle his drives, we encounter another set of problems. We know that boys and girls in puberty and early adolescence normally feel disturbed about the strength of their impulses. They worry about masturbation and their sexual fantasies and, unlike the younger child, guard these secrets closely and suffer in silence. Above all, the adolescent's growing desire for independence means that he must manage his impulses largely by controls from within, rather than relying on externally imposed limits. Here, in puberty, we find so often that the child's earlier education is put to the test. If parental reactions toward the childhood manifestations of sexuality have been either too strict or too lenient the inner controls of the adolescent may be unstable.

#### **Pressures in adolescence—and before**

Although the adolescent often behaves as though he didn't need us and could manage his affairs without us, he wants us to be on the side of his conscience, and he wants support from us in managing his impulses. Now it is no less true in adolescence than in childhood that our educational measures must be closely geared to the requirements of a developmental stage. With this in mind I would propose that we examine some of our cultural attitudes toward puberty in the light of what we know about this stage of development.

It is currently the fashion in many communities for parents, schools and youth organizations to promote boy-girl relationships in puberty and even pre-puberty through dances, parties and dating practices which are modeled on those of late

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adolescence. This means that the party becomes a "date" and that the little girl must have an escort—and, in some circles, a corsage, too! Even theater and supper dates for boys and girls of twelve to fifteen years—or less—are encouraged. (Let me document the "or less." A friend of mine, a psychiatrist, found himself at odds with his social circle last year when he objected because his ten-year-old son had been invited to escort a ten-year-old girl to a "formal" dinner party for children.)

Along with this is the current fad of "going steady": the pledging of eternal and exclusive vows which, because of the nature of puberty, do not prevent the "going" from becoming unsteady after two or three weeks. The rings and photographs are then redeemed with a sporting ungrudgingness and are filed away for the brief period required to find another undying love. These precocious courtship games are smiled on indulgently by the grownup world.

Those parents and educators who support early dating activities justify their stand by the assertion that such early associations ease the way into adolescence, and make boy-girl relationships "normal" and "natural." We should all be in favor of easing the way into heterosexuality. But let us examine the results of this accelerated program. Anyone who has ever attended a boy-girl party in early puberty can testify that the dangers of post-office are not to be feared. The chaperone is advised to give her undivided attention to the protection of furniture. For when these parties are not out-and-out bores, with the girls dancing together and the boys playing leap-frog, the energies of these children, too young for courtship, are exhausted on the neutral furniture or in the war games

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of early childhood. ("The party started off awful!" a twelve-year-old hostess confided to me. "Everyone sat around and didn't do anything. Then Mummy brought on the hamburgers and then Eddie squirted catsup in Danny's face, and Danny rubbed catsup in Eddie's hair, and then everyone squirted catsup and we really had fun.")

These observations are not intended as an argument against boy-girl associations in early puberty. But from the behavior of these youngsters when thrown together we can see that they are not ready for the relationships involved in the courtship patterns of later adolescence in our culture. Because these boys and girls are afraid of each other and afraid of their sexual reactions, they can only establish contacts through reverting to infantile prototypes. But this is not damaging—a little catsup in the hair is not harmful to any youngster. What *can* be damaging is the pressure upon youngsters today to accelerate their heterosexuality at a pace which is not geared to emotional readiness. So we have the spectacle today of little girls of twelve and thirteen who are bitterly resigned to spinsterhood because they have had no dates, of bolder little girls who are "going steady" but confess they have not yet "had a thrill" from a kiss, of boys of fourteen who feel that their masculinity has failed the test because they cannot bring themselves to ask a girl for a date. These are children who are burdened with all the normal stresses of puberty plus the abnormal pressures imposed upon them by their community. At a period in development when the young girl is most anxious about her femininity, her unripe femininity is put to a severe test. At a time when the pubertal boy is flooded with terrible doubts

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about his masculinity and is still searching the mirror for a sign of fuzz on his upper lip, his culture presses him to prove a masculinity of which he himself is quite unsure. The introduction to heterosexuality becomes an ordeal, a contest, a strenuous and often a joyless game of courtship played by children who are too young to love or even to obtain an erotic response.

But does all this belong in a discussion of "sex education" and "helping children establish controls"? I personally feel that it does. We do not help the child in puberty and early adolescence to manage his sexual impulses if we burden him with the necessity of proving himself before there is physical and emotional readiness for dating, or for even the most innocent forms of love-making. We only increase the conflict and in some instances create a kind of desperate need to prove femininity or masculinity which races ahead of the immature body and personality of the child. I believe that if the adult world withdrew its support, or its indulgence, of precocious dating activities in early adolescence we would find the scale of such activities greatly reduced. We could encourage instead many activities for the early adolescents which bring boys and girls together without involving them in a dating code.

#### **Teaching postponement**

In adolescence, as in childhood, one of the functions of sex education is the teaching of postponement. One of the inevitable and necessary outcomes of sex instruction is the child's realization that the mysteries of adult sexual activity and the means of procreation which he is learning about cannot be experienced with his child's equipment: he must wait until he is an adult. Tommy and Polly might have imagined that their little peeking games could mysteriously produce a baby, but their sex instruction will necessarily frustrate these fantasies. Only a grown-up mother and daddy can make a baby, we explain to them. Now it is certainly worth mentioning that this frustration of the child's wish-

es, and his realization that his child's equipment must grow up before these wishes can be gratified, is in itself a factor in the decline of sexual activity in childhood. For such wishes provide certain of the motives for sexual activity in early childhood, and when the wishes are defeated in the present and deferred to a far distant future the interest in sexual activity declines, too. This is one of the ways in which sex education becomes a means of control.

In adolescence, too, our sex education can teach postponement. While the biological equipment of the child in puberty and early adolescence is developing, it is not yet mature. Although the young adolescent is impatient to be grown and to discover for himself some of the mysteries which he has heard about, he needs to learn that biological puberty is not in itself a license or a certification of fitness for man's estate.

#### **An illustration**

Here I should like to tell a story. It is not a typical story but it illustrates a problem in the sex education of the early adolescent.

Some years ago a fourteen-year-old girl was brought to see me at a clinic. Four times in the previous six months Laura had been found in tourist camps in the company of boys, and had been brought each time into the juvenile detention home. She was the daughter of a respected family in a small community and until recently had never given her parents cause for concern. She was a beautiful child who might easily have passed for seventeen or eighteen. When I first saw her, her face was sealed into composure by layers of mask make-up and her eyelashes were beaded to give her a cynical stare. She struck a pose of scorn and indifference which was not at all difficult to see through. She was scared, and she must have rehearsed this scene many times since she learned she was coming to see me.

It was not very difficult, after all, to get her confidence, and she told me the story of her sexual adventures with candor, though with some embarrassment. With the

exception of one boy, whom she mentioned last, each of the boys with whom she had spent the night seemed faceless, nameless, almost unreal, having the same relationship to an adolescent fantasy as does a photograph of a movie star on the bedroom dresser. From her story I sketched out in my own mind her family background, and saw her parents as over-strict but also anxious and confused. She did not blame her parents for her promiscuity, nor did she resort to the alibi of seduction. She did not claim ignorance of sexual matters; on the contrary, she had always found her parents willing to discuss her questions. Had I asked her to, I am sure she could have given an accurate account of sexual processes and we would have found that her promiscuity was not motivated by ignorance. (It rarely is.)

#### **"Something wrong"**

After we had talked for a while and I felt her friendliness, I asked her a question: "Did you enjoy it with the boys?" (It was a safe question. I could almost guess the answer.) Laura hesitated for a moment, then said miserably, "No. Not like you're supposed to." I realized then that Laura thought there was something wrong with her! Then I told her that I was not at all surprised to hear this because young boys and girls were not ready yet to enjoy sex relations "like you're supposed to," that this was something that came with physical maturity and, most important, when one was very much in love. It would come later when she was older and could love the way grownups love, the way married people love. Laura listened to this with surprise on her face and gave me a searching look to be sure that I was telling her the truth. Then, satisfied that I was, she said very thoughtfully, "I never knew that."

The story ends well. I saw Laura for counseling for many months afterwards. She never again resumed her promiscuous relations with boys, and settled down to normal adolescent dating. We are not always rewarded in child guidance with such

immediate good results. Laura's story is not typical for all adolescence or for all clinical work, but we learn something from it which seems to me of value in considering sex education in adolescence.

#### **An age of anxieties**

Laura was not ignorant of sexual matters. Her parents' sex education had been thorough on the instructional side, but this education had somehow failed to establish the connections between sexual feelings and the conditions under which they could be gratified. In order for Laura to bring her sexual behavior under control, she needed to understand that what she was seeking in sex experience could not be obtained now, that it belonged to maturity and to the physical and emotional conditions which could only be achieved in maturity. Laura's promiscuity was not caused by an excess of drive, either. It was anxiety that caused her to move from one casual relationship to the next. Each experience was a disappointment so that she had to repeat it with another boy to try herself out again. It was a desperate attempt to prove her femininity.

Even the more innocent experiments in love are likely to come to grief in early adolescence. Many youngsters who regard their puberty as a kind of passport into the adult world, have confided to me with feelings ranging from disappointment to alarm that they did not enjoy kissing or necking in the way they expected one should from observations of love-making on the screen or in novels. Yet this inability to respond is to be expected in early adolescence. A complex psychological re-integration of personality is necessary before the adolescent achieves physical response. In this unintegrated phase of early adolescence the first timid experiments in love-making are far less exciting than the fantasies. Confronted with a real boy, a real girl, erotic feelings may disappear or arise with such intensity that the young adolescent is afraid of them and must suppress them. When the very young adolescent experiences the failure of



his first experiments, however innocent they may be, he is convinced that something must be wrong with him. In his anxiety he may move from one partner to another to repeat his timid experiments—and his failure—again and again. Here again we can be of enormous help to the young adolescent if we can help him understand that readiness for love and love-making is not established by the signs of puberty.

#### **Sex and love**

The story of Laura is instructive from still another point of view. For it seems that it had not occurred to Laura that sexual feelings and love belonged together. Like so many adolescents she had regarded sexual experiences as a mechanical process. This troubles us. Is this a gap in our sex education? In our efforts to give children a scientific view of sexuality have we given it a clinical isolation from the experience of love? Or is it an even larger

problem than this? Is this the extra-mural sex education which the adolescent's culture gives him?

An observer of our culture cannot fail to remark on the way in which the category "sex" has acquired an existence of its own, an independent function or group of functions which can be considered apart from its human objects, a biological urge which seeks discharge. This view of human sexuality can find spokesmen among men of science as well as the writers of screen scenarios and popular songs. It permits a reputable scientist to employ the criterion of orgasm, discharge of tension, for the measurement of human sexuality. It supports the popular fallacy that the excitement produced by a pin-up girl is in the same category as the reactions induced by a flesh and blood partner in love: both are "sex." This view of human sexuality as simply the mechanics of stimulation and discharge, regardless of the partner, and hence without qualitative difference, contradicts everything we have learned in fifty years about the psychology of human sexual experience.

If we are to teach adolescents to manage their sexual impulses we need to consider the effect of those cultural attitudes which isolate sexuality and love. Sexuality is devalued in the mechanical view. But in order for the adolescent to achieve "control," to postpone satisfaction, sexuality must be valued by being put in the context of human relationships. Our sex education must do more than instruct; it must educate the adolescent to the civilized view that human sexuality achieves its greatest satisfaction when it is united with love and tenderness in an enduring human partnership.

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# Can we educate for family living?

By Margaret C. Dawson

Trying to help young people with their human relations is the ambitious goal which has replaced "sex education" in many schools and community agencies

What is "Family Life Education"? There is no ready answer. At times the term is expanded to cover courses exploring basic human relationships and at others watered down to mean little more than domestic science classes. The following definition indicates what it is at its most ambitious level:

"Education for personal and family living is an organized effort to provide appropriately graded information and experiences that will develop in each individual an appreciation of himself, his family and society so that he may achieve maximum physical, emotional, social and spiritual growth and therefore live harmoniously with members of his own and of the opposite sex . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Faced with a goal of this magnitude, parents and educators alike might well ask, "Can we teach such a subject?"

"We can try. And we 'better had,'" is the answer being given by an increasing number of schools, religious bodies and community agencies in the United States. This article reports on some of the developments along these lines. It represents only a random sampling of programs in various parts of the country, with emphasis on the

role of the schools. Yet the materials and interviews from which these data are drawn will provide a picture of the sometimes wobbly trends, and the astonishing variety of current patterns—and some of the reasons behind them.

## **The background**

There is pretty general agreement that, ideally, the natural and best place for education about successful family living is in the family itself. However, the plain fact is that many parents feel they need help in even trying to approximate goals which are becoming more complex and demanding every day. Actually, it has often been the parents who have asked their schools and churches and social agencies to lend a hand.

The idea that an organized effort in the schools should be made to help young people with personal experiences, emotions and conduct had its genesis in "straight" sex education. It is not generally remembered today that the pioneers in sex education of some three or four decades ago, such as M. J. Exner and T. W. Galloway, were profoundly and primarily interested in ethical values. (In fact, so elevated is the moral tone of some of these early writings that even today, when the emphasis has shifted back to ethics and attitudes,

<sup>1</sup> A formulation by staff members of the American Social Hygiene Association.



they seem almost incredibly unrealistic.) However, sex education at one time came to mean, at least in the public mind, stark physiological instruction. To some extent, this was actually a misunderstanding of the aims of those who planned the programs. Nevertheless, there were over-zealous or poorly equipped teachers who approached the task in this very fashion, as though "sex" were an isolated part of human life and one to be explained by exposition of the "facts." Some teachers, facing this new demand, probably forced themselves to be too bold and blunt out of the need to overcome the hesitations and embarrassments rooted in their own taboo-ridden upbringing. In any case, the term "sex education" met with increasing resistance from the public.

"Social hygiene" was the term next tried. But it proved to be too limited. To begin with, there was a tendency for people to associate this term solely with information about venereal diseases and the effort to suppress prostitution. Also, the proponents of sex education were coming to realize that it was a contradiction to say that sex was a vital part of everyone's experience and then to treat it as a separate subject, apart from all the other parts of living.

Logically, then, a more inclusive term had to be used to indicate broader aims; and "education for family living" made its appearance.

#### **Why try?**

The subject presents a stiff challenge. But the hard fact is that we, as citizens as well as parents, cannot abandon the effort to give our children more and better help in building good human relationships. For one thing, we are at last beginning to realize that the courts, the clinics, the jails and the mental institutions provide a sorry and expensive sequence to ignorance and lack of guidance. A statement of policy prepared in 1948 by the Michigan State Committee on Health Education gives some statistical reasons for believing that it is imperative to do what we can on the more

humane and fruitful level of education. Says the report:

"Cases of primary and secondary syphilis in Michigan's 10- to 19-year olds increased 253 percent from 1922 to 1946 . . . In 1946 there were 3,908 illegitimate children reported born in Michigan . . . The greatest number of those reported . . . were born to mothers from 12 to 19 years of age. The number of divorces increased 142 percent from 1940 to 1946."

The Michigan report goes on to note that in a study of 409 successful marriages, the couples stated that sex adjustment was the second most difficult problem they had faced (spending of the family income came first). It then proceeds to outline basic principles for the sex education program which, in the light of such figures, seems desirable in schools, colleges and the institutions training teachers.

Another one of the most indisputable arguments in favor of sex education is that children are going to get it somehow, and that parents are faced with the choice of letting them pick up obscenities, vulgarisms and harmful superstitions from what it quaintly called "the gutter," or of seeing that they get a true picture of the facts, presented with as much objectivity and understanding of the child's needs as possible. Since many parents find this a very hard thing to do, the conclusion is that until parents themselves are very much better informed and at ease in discussing sex with their children, there is a job for educators and counselors to tackle.

But perhaps the most compelling reason of all was given by the youngster in Texas who said, "Everything is taught in [our] high schools except the things you have to know."

#### **How shall we approach the job?**

A reasonable amount of physiological information will have to be included in any program that sets out to deal seriously and effectively with relations between the sexes. But educators differ greatly in their opinions of how much of this material should

be introduced and in what way. The growing preference, judging from reports from various sections of the country, seems to be in favor of what is called "integration." This means that the emphasis is shifted away from "factual" teaching and that the scope of the whole venture is much enlarged. Content and materials related to family living are not put into one separate course nor taught at just one or two grade levels but are brought into other studies wherever a natural connection occurs. Home economics and hygiene teachers point out that they have been concerned with many of the elements of good daily living for years and it is to these departments that many schools first turn in the development of an integrated program. Biology, of course, is the logical starting point for learning about the reproductive system; social studies offer good opportunities for discussing the history of the family as a social institution, the arguments for monogamous marriage, the relation of democracy to modern marriage and a number of other situations in which personal lives and social forces affect each other.

But these are by no means the only studies that are enlisted. Many school outlines suggest using the English courses to give new meaning to family experience, both through the insights of fiction and poetry and through the journalistic media. Even mathematics, which might seem to offer a rather arid approach, is called upon in connection with the all-too-human subject of budgets and family finance.

Programs of this sort are a long way from being in general use. Yet they are gaining

wide acceptance and there are numerous places where they are now being carried on. Differences of opinion, however, begin to develop more sharply when we come to two questions affecting integrated programs: when should they begin; and should there be, at some point, a separate unit of specifically physiological sex instruction?

Begin in the kindergarten, insists one school of thought. It is at this age, says one pamphlet,<sup>2</sup> that "the child's natural curiosity is very active, his interest spontaneous, his questions direct." People with this philosophy are apt to be the ones who also advocate some more advanced and specific instruction in physical sex functions and processes in later grades, but again there are differences of opinion on when, and how much and on whether all such instruction should be given to boys and girls together, or only some of it, or whether the whole matter should be taken up in classes segregated by sex.

In hearty disagreement with all of these premises are those who believe that anything to do with homemaking or family living comes properly in the high school years only, and that sex instruction *per se* should not be the concern of the school at all. In between are numerous shades of opinion and a corresponding variety of programs.

#### **Theory in action**

What are some of the actual courses, and their results—where these are in any way measurable?

Wisconsin, which decreased its illegitimacy rate over 18 percent during a 15-year period when neighboring states averaged a 2 percent rise, and claims one of the lowest divorce rates over a similar period, also has one of the lowest venereal disease rates in the United States. State authorities give the credit for these achievements to a "long-range, planned program of sex education." As part of this program, sex education lectures by public health educators have long

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#### **Pleas for Advice**

*Look Magazine* of September 7th carried a six-page illustrated article by Mrs. Aline Auerbach of CSAA on "What Should Children Be Told About Sex?" As a result, the Association received more than 3,000 letters, among them many touching pleas for advice and guidance. Reprints are available from CSAA at the special price of 15¢, including postage and handling.

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<sup>2</sup> *Education for Personal and Family Living*. American Social Hygiene Society; New York, 1948.

been made available to junior and senior high school students, as well as to community groups. But only recently has there been an effort to weave the subject into the school curriculum. Now being recommended are: "incidental" information on the elementary level; integrated information in junior and senior high schools, followed by a regular semester course on family life education in the 12th grade; and a "realistic" personal guidance program for every school.

Highland Park, Michigan, which takes pride in having had the longest (15 years) continuous program in the State, starts right in with the kindergartners (nature studies), goes through the grades (films, stories about family life, science units) into the senior high school years where courses in mental hygiene and preparation for marriage are required. Both high school and junior college students have a chance to get some firsthand knowledge of children by assisting in the work of the Nursery School.

Mrs. Marjorie Cosgrove, under whose aegis this rounded program has developed, says, "Emotions and a style of life are contagious. It is our responsibility to make sure that the next generation of children catch wholesome ones." However, she goes on to say that "There is no value in discussing beliefs and practices on one level if young people are operating on another level. It is unrealistic and students soon label it a 'phony.'" These sentiments find an echo in many programs where the very real and ever-present social and personal problems of teenagers are given the center of the stage.

One example of this is the San Antonio program, now some six years old. The teacher who was to carry the course, and a committee of school administrators, called a series of meetings of students representing each high school in the city. Together they planned San Antonio's basic course in family life education. What did the young people want? To know how to get along better with their families; how

to be good parents and have successful marriages; "everything about dating from manners and petting to beyond."

Since these are major concerns in practically any adolescent group in this country today, it is not surprising that they crop up over and over again in any course or program where open discussion is allowed. How are they handled? Again, in a variety of ways, most of which boil down to "talking things over," sometimes supplemented by reading, sometimes by films, at other times by role-playing—informal playlets in which the actors have a chance to "try on" the viewpoints of other people, adults included. How explicit the teacher may be about physical facts is hard to tell, and varies with the setting and the teacher. But many of the reports state that "we do not side-step questions" even though the curriculum does not specifically provide for such discussions.

The Family Relationships course in Toms River, New Jersey, originally started in 1941 as an attack on delinquency and divorce, is now slanted toward the more immediate goals of individual problem solving and adjustment. Mrs. Elizabeth S. Force, who has taught the course since its beginning, tells why it was refocused in this way: the more grandiose the goals, she explains, the more one is open to attack for a single failure, for one thing; and the harder it is for the students themselves to know whether or not they are getting something out of the course. The present objective,

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however, is in itself no task for the faint-hearted. It is "to try to help boys and girls become happier, better adjusted, more contented, more valued and valuable members of their present family groups; to help them start marriage and establish homes with something more than good intentions."

The materials and techniques here are multiple. Among them are study guides prepared in workbook form, panel discussions, study groups, speakers, films. One of the chief aims is to keep young people close to sources of dependable adult council in the community, and to this end the school calls in parents, business men, lawyers, court officials, doctors, nurses, clergymen and just plain young and old married folk to talk to the students.

#### **A confused picture**

It is well to remember that, as Mrs. Force says, much of the progress in the last decade has been verbal or on paper. She reports<sup>3</sup> that replies to a questionnaire sent in 1950 to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 48 states added up to a picture of "utter confusion." Summarizing these reports she gives it as her opinion that:

"Performance in the high schools is extremely spotty.

"Confusion and doubt still exist in the minds of school people as to the purpose, the philosophy and the wisdom of teaching this kind of material.

"There seems to be a feeling of helplessness as to how to go about the task. In high places as well as low there is a hesitancy, based perhaps on lack of public understanding and fear of public reaction, which is delaying, and in some cases paralyzing, action.

"To the schoolman who said, philosophically, 'It's a hot potato; I don't want any part of it,' we must unfortunately say, 'you have lots of company.'"

Under these circumstances, credit goes

both to those school systems that have kept programs going over the years and to those that are trying to break new ground. New Jersey has a long history of sex education under public auspices and was one of the first places where accredited courses were given for teachers of family life education. Educators and public officials there also claim a high degree of public backing for the various programs. Shaker Heights, Cleveland, which has a 25-year start, has not discarded the teaching of forthright physical facts, but is contemplating a broadening of the course to give more emphasis to the "life situation" approach, and to encourage parents to study subjects paralleling those their children are learning. The outline of Denver courses puts some emphasis (as do the program materials from many other communities) on trying to counteract the effect of mass media stereotypes of glamorous love, romance and happily-ever-after marriage. A report from Pennsylvania (1953), where a sizeable proportion of the schools is said to offer sex education of some kind, states that physiological information is given on a wide range of subjects, from the anatomy of the generative organs to menstrual hygiene, masturbation, heredity and eugenics and prostitution, though not all subjects in all schools. The Florida State Department of Education has drawn up an inclusive program of health and safety education for possible use in the schools. New York City, though it has always taught elements of homemaking, is only now attempting to draw up a somewhat more formalized Family Life program.

#### **Other patterns: the government agency**

A recent bulletin put out by the U.S. Office of Education<sup>4</sup> gives in full detail the stories of two counties and two cities where family life programs were developed with the assistance of its Division of Vocational Education. Started in 1938, these

3 "High School Education for Family Living," reprinted from the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*; Nov., 1950.

4 *With Focus on Family Living*, By Muriel W. Brown, Federal Security Agency, Office of Education; Washington, D.C., 1953.

four projects provide a mine of information on the way in which such an enterprise can grow from a gleam in somebody's eye into a solid and enduring fact, and are especially illuminating on the complex problem of school-community cooperation. This bulletin is a good place to start, also, if one wants to get a picture of the number of agencies, individuals, professions, organizations and even business interests that may be drawn on in any one program. True, there have been instances where schools have found that a well-meant effort to enlist the interest of the community only stirred up a hornet's nest of misunderstandings and the disruption of a good project. Badly stung, such schools have advised going easy on the publicity. Nevertheless, the longer-lived programs seem to have met the problem and turned it into an asset. Indeed, many of them began with the premise that this was a community undertaking from the word go.

#### **Community agencies**

In many cases, a family life program is initiated by some organization outside the schools, or tangential to them. We have already seen that a government agency may provide the spark. Education for personal and family living is, of course, a major concern of Social Hygiene Associations, Mental Health Associations and many other community agencies.

Then there are such privately endowed organizations as the Clara Elizabeth Fund in Flint, Michigan and the E. C. Brown Trust in Oregon. The former was set up as a fund for the promotion of maternal health and was first concerned with maternal and infant mortality. But after giving instruction to pregnant mothers and young fathers-to-be, the Fund found itself carrying on with help to the young parents after the baby's arrival. At some point, parents began asking for still further assistance in telling their youngsters about sex. Thus began the classes for various age groups of children at which each child must be accompanied by at least one parent or a par-

#### **Pamphlet on adolescence**

With its new pamphlet, *The Adolescent in Your Family*, the U.S. Children's Bureau adds a fifth title to its list of bulletins on child development. The others are: *Prenatal Care*; *Infant Care*; *Your Child from One to Six*; *Your Child from Six to Twelve*. The new bulletin is for sale at 25¢ per copy from the Sup't. of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C.

ent substitute. From this it was an easy step to family life classes in the school and to a personal counseling service.

The E. C. Brown Trust has attacked the problem from another, and very important, angle: the training of the teachers. Three developmental centers in family life are administered and sponsored by the Trust in cooperation with the State Education authorities. Pre-schoolyear workshops introduce teachers to the subject, after which they may register for a one-term extension course, carrying University of Oregon credit. Assistance with the formulation of courses for the schools is another part of the Trust activity.

#### **The churches**

Churches of all denominations have, of course, been traditionally concerned with personal counseling, with ethics and with human relations. Today there is evidence that many ministers and rabbis feel that the sexual elements in human conduct need to be more specifically related to religious thought and precept. Professor Seward Hiltner, of the University of Chicago, writing in the magazine *Pastoral Psychology*,<sup>5</sup> says: "We believe that there is a kind of thought and concern emerging about sex matters among many churchmen—uniting what modern knowledge and insight have given us with the traditional concern and content of the churches . . ." Churches and synagogues in many communities are demonstrating their agreement with him through programs for adults and children. Here again there is a great variety in con-

<sup>5</sup> *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 26, Sept., 1952.



tent and procedures: so much so that, again, even a random sampling must be deferred to another time. Likewise, the vast amount of parent education that feeds into the whole stream of family life education—and which some authorities feel is the most basic contribution of all—can only be noted here.

#### **Individual counseling**

There are also a number of individuals—physicians, counselors and others—who talk to groups of young people, both in and out of schools, frequently under PTA or other parent group auspices.

Since the "talk" by a doctor was originally so central a part of sex education in this country, a little more should be said about its present status and its evolution from the hair-raising lecture of times past. In this bygone era it was assumed (as unfortunately it is still assumed in some quarters) that the main point of sex education was the repression of sex interest. What better weapon, then, than fear? The descriptions of evils to follow on sex "indulgence" were horrendous indeed. The answer to all troublesome impulses or fantasies was to take a cold shower and run around the block. But this kind of "education" seems to have become largely discredited, not least by the doctors themselves.

Dr. Milton I. Levine, New York pediatrician and author, with Jean H. Seligman, of *The Wonder of Life*,<sup>6</sup> says from his long experience in sex education that the physician still has a special advantage in this work, in that people of all ages consider him authoritative. If, combined with this asset, the doctor has a feeling of warmth toward both generations, and a readiness to deal with their actual concerns, his opportunities are endless. Dr. Levine finds that young people are ready to open up under these circumstances and that the range of their interests proves to be amazing. Quite a number have read the Kinsey books, and

want to discuss them. Even the dirty jokes which youngsters bring him for explanation can be turned to good educational account, if properly handled. Amongst his many activities in this field, Dr. Levine currently gives a series of five talks at churches and synagogues—three with the parents and children together, and one each with the boys and girls in separate groups.

Another physician who has worked extensively with groups in New York communities is Dr. William Barger. Invited to speak, under PTA auspices, to 6th, 7th and 8th grades, Dr. Barger makes a point of going over his plans and materials with the parents before meeting with the young people, and of stating that his role is to supplement, rather than to substitute for, parental guidance. He prefers the term "social hygiene" to "sex education" and gives physical facts in the context of ethical considerations. Far from wanting to scare the children, he is eager to find out what questions are really troubling them and how anxieties can be eased while realistic information is given. He reports that parents are often astounded to learn of the questions and problems their children have brought to him. One doubtful parent was converted to this type of education when he learned that his son had been helped by Dr. Barger's information to forestall a potentially disturbing experience at camp.

#### **Misguided guidance**

One further type of sex education should be mentioned here because in some communities this is the only way in which any type of specific "sex instruction" is brought to children. This is the material warning children about sex offenders. Much of this material is grossly overstated and, reaching children who are completely unprepared, can have a most damaging effect.<sup>7</sup>

#### **The problems**

One can readily see that the first ques-

<sup>6</sup> *The Wonder of Life*. By Milton I. Levine, M.D. and Jean H. Seligman; Simon & Schuster; New York, 1940.

<sup>7</sup> For a very offensive example see *Playtime with Patty and Wilbur*. By Hugh C. McDonald, Murray & Gee; California, 1954, while Edith M. Stern's article, "The Facts of Sex Offenses Against Children," *Parents' Magazine*, October, 1954, is most constructive and informative.



tion that must concern the educator, whether he is talking to one small group of youngsters or planning a many-branched family life program is: What do the young people really want to know?

When we say "really want to know" we must not assume that because a girl wants to know how far she can go on a petting party that she does not also "really want to know" about ways of getting on better with her parents or making her home more attractive. One concern cannot be substituted for the other. Physiology will not help her carry on a conversation with her date nor even assure her of better relations with her peers. Neither, on the other hand, will discussions of family cooperation give her peace of mind if she fears that she is frigid or thinks that conception can take place by kissing. It is all to the good, surely, that we have got away from the idea that physical facts can be useful to young people if presented without the context of attitudes, emotions, relationships. It is hard to see, though, how an overemphasis on "attitudes," without what we will still have to call the facts of life, can do anything but reinforce the schism between moral tenets and actual practices that we know to be part of our society.

#### **What do they ask?**

What do children ask? How is a baby made and born? How does the seed grow in the mother? How does it get there? Yes, certainly. And the answers have been carefully formulated in many excellent and useful materials. But as the youngsters grow through puberty they also want to know, "Am I queer? What is a pervert? What shall I do about masturbation? Why don't I get a kick out of kissing?" They also ask some very surprising questions—adults sometimes forget the odd things that can worry and frighten the young or simply make them curious.

Here, for instance, are some of the questions asked by 9- to 11-year olds in a Family Life Class at the Lutheran Church of the Epiphany in Hempstead, Long Island:

"When the man bird is on top of the lady bird, how do both openings get together since they are both under the tail feathers?"

"What happens if the mother and the father of the human race do not want a baby but the egg is there?"

"If Christine Jorgensen married would she marry a man or a woman?"

"If a boy and girl join, what happens if the girl's eggs go into the boy's body instead of the boy's egg going into the girl's body?"

"How does the father know his egg is inside him?"

"How does it (the sperm) lose the tail?"

"Do you pin it (a sanitary pad) to the belt first and then climb in?"

"What was this thing in the papers about frozen sperm? How did the men that froze the sperm get it out of the male body?"

The answers offered the children in this program were clear and precise and yet gently toned and occasionally humorous, as when the teacher said that the sperm tail "just disintegrates — goes kapoof." They ranged from some fairly technical, scientific data, which the children seemed from further questions to absorb, to practical advice on what to do "if you are out in a car with a fellow and start to menstruate." (The answer: ask him to stop at a gas station—rest rooms usually have boxes containing sanitary pads.)

#### **The teacher's problem**

But how many children are getting the specific and well-keyed help with their worries that was being given by this teacher?

The answer to that question can only be: not nearly enough. This is certainly not the sole fault of the teachers. There are, to begin with, comparatively few places and ways in which teachers can get training in the teaching of family life and/or sex education. Burdened with a hundred other demands, many teachers throw up their hands at the idea of trying to acquire still another technique. Many are disqualified by personal attitudes and early upbringing.

and frankly say that they cannot bring themselves to handle the questions that come up. Some do not feel that this kind of education is the school's business at all. Of these problems, Lester A. Kirkendall, Associate Professor of Family Life Education, Oregon State College, says:

"When teaching moves over into areas where conflict, and the deep emotions of people are involved . . . the trouble begins. First, the teachers (and most of the rest of us) are fearful of strong emotions. Second, the teachers' problems of personal and family adjustment get entangled with the problems of the pupils. Time and again we have found the teacher's personal problems raising blocks, producing biases, or developing anxieties. This is especially true in matters which involve sex and parent-child relations. Another difficulty is that teachers find it almost impossible to avoid being judgmental when dealing with such problems. They say they want to counsel. Instead they actually pass judgments."

Certainly these problems are not peculiar to teachers but are shared by adults in every walk of life who have not had extensive training in such matters. The attempt to solve them will involve the establishment of far more than the occasional workshops, extension courses and individual conferences which are now the teachers' only resources—and these only in a few places. In the meantime, those who have a genius for, and interest in, this kind of teaching, carry a heavy load and deserve the accolade.

#### **Community support**

The problem of getting community acceptance and support has already been mentioned. Some communities have found it easy. One letter says, "We have had community acceptance for the most part without working for it. When the programs have been explained to the public they have gone right along." This, however, does not seem to be a common experience. The long process of consultation with parents and community leaders; the problem of in-

terpretation to the press; the letters, and meetings and committees and formulations and forms to be filled out—all the elaborate preliminaries which have been the lot of some planning groups are formidable indeed. And the results of all this can be overthrown by one irresponsible editorial or by one poor result with a child which arouses parents' ire. One educator writes us:

"I can cite my own experience as an example of what damage the wrong kind of newspaper publicity can do to a successful ongoing program of *many years* (italics ours). A garbled article with an inflammatory headline aroused resistance and the course was dropped. The PTA in the school tried by every possible means to have the course restored but it has never been done and there is little likelihood that it ever will be, or so it seems. This was six years ago. As a result of this publicity the policy of avoiding anything whatsoever that bears on the subject has been meticulously adhered to. Even elementary school children whose parents organize classes for special instruction in family living are denied the use of the school for classes at any time."

#### **Continuity**

The above quote shows how easily a well-established program can be blown sky high. There are other, less spectacular, reasons for the loss of ground that had seemed well gained. There is the teacher turnover; the change in school administrators—a lukewarm or hostile attitude on the part of a new superintendent can dampen the enthusiasm of the teaching staff in jig time; and the unpredictable changes in the climate of public opinion.

#### **The scope of the courses**

Sometimes it seems that Hamlet has not only been left out of the play but that it has become bad form to mention him. Whatever happened to the sex in sex education? One writer, describing how best to set up a Family Life program, bluntly advises: "*Leave sex out of it.*"

Most Family Life courses admit the need to give young people some physiological information; a few programs do so to an almost excessive degree. But there are also those that go to amazing lengths to avoid the shadow of anything disturbing. These take refuge in the "homemaking" arts, so that we even find the making of lemonade and cookies listed as part of the "family life education" of a large school system. Apart from the question of straight sex information—or the lack of it—there are some indications that the term "education for personal and family living" has tempted the planners to float off into the ether. What are we to make of an outline, for instance, that suggests starting the course with a lecture on astronomy, so that the students could "place" mankind in the universe?

**Are attitudes taught or "caught"?**

A question must also be raised about two assumptions which are commonly made in the materials on family life education. The

first of these is that attitudes can be "taught." The second is the disturbing one that any right-minded person knows *what* attitudes *should* be taught.

At first glance, these questions may seem unjustified. Adults do, whether they mean to or not, influence young people's attitudes in a hundred ways—why not in a purposeful, well-thought-out course of discussions and talks? Certainly there is no reason why they should not try. But attitudes are not quickly changed or picked up: as we know, they are the product of a daily living process in which there are any number of elements. The danger may lie not in trying to hand on to a youngster some valuable ideas about conduct and desirable aims, but in putting too much faith in the results. What, for instance, will a child from an unhappy, quarrelsome background get from being told that he should "appreciate home and family life"? Or one who has been exposed to gang mores for years, if his teacher attempts to convey to him that he should "guide sex impulses by reason, considera-

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About the cats on Firefly Island, and their devoted friend who turned them from strays into family pets.  
Ages 6-10 \$2.25

tion and social welfare rather than by impulses and self-gratification?"

As Dr. Gage Wetherill, Director of Health Education in San Diego, says, "It is important that social hygiene teachers understand the backgrounds from which some students come. Teachers protected by the environment of the better social circles may be unaware of these backgrounds. It is the successful counselor who projects his understanding to the homes and personal problems of these young people. Excessive drinking, bickering and vulgarity are not unusual home conditions. Some students come to school from families where there is marital unhappiness, perversion and prostitution . . . Social hygiene education [for such children] is serious business."

Dr. Wetherill is commenting here on a lack of realism in our schools which drew fire at the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth from Professor Allison Davis. At that time Professor Davis said, "The vast store of ability in millions of children in the lower socioeconomic groups is largely wasted because their teachers do not understand the basic cultural habits of the working groups." As with ability, so with understanding—it may be irretrievably lost if the approach is wrong.

Again, it may be said that any group of intelligent, responsible citizens could draw up a list of attitudes that would help a young person grow toward wholesomeness. Yet one manual for parent-teacher guidance lists as an objective "to convince of the futility of the weakling in the struggle for any kind of success that counts." This incredible tenet needs no comment. Also, we sometimes find, in advice of this sort, a suggestion of the "cold bath" school of thought which assumes that the only way to handle sex is to get rid of it. Again, is it wise to teach the "disastrous results that interfere with happiness when an individual 'bucks' social conventions"? Unless carefully qualified, this could mean that conformity should be put above everything, including conscience. This is especially a

danger in a generation which has stressed the concept of "adjustment" to the point where all standards seem to have merged into the single aim of winning majority approval. These instances are only a few of literally dozens of "recommended" attitudes.

The drawing up of a complete moral and ethical code for our young people is an ambitious undertaking, and might open the door to many of the social and personal stereotypes that a generation of educators has sought so hard to avoid. Surely the improvement of family life does not depend on the development of an "approved" pattern for all families.

#### **The question before us**

Despite these and other unresolved problems in education for family living, it still seems that—on the record—the family needs some reinforcement from schools, churches and community agencies in helping children to understand themselves and others; and that, from their side, more educators, ministers and community workers are becoming aware of this responsibility. Some of the progress may be "on paper"; some of it is real, and the fruit of hard work. But before parents, churches, schools, libraries and community agencies can provide widespread and effective help for our children, a lot more needs to be done. This article has dealt only with the programming aspects of the problem. But there are also gaps in our knowledge of how human beings behave and how they can be brought to accept changes in their behavior—gaps which have been far too widely ignored in our efforts to "teach" the subtleties of human relationships. In fact, one might almost say that much of what we *have* learned has been brushed aside in the effort to secure public acceptance. It is not easy to see how this could have been avoided. But it is plain that so vital and tremendous an undertaking as education for family living will demand heavy contributions of thought, energy and courage from us all. They are well worth making.

By Walter Bonime

## The sense of self in children

Children will try in many ways, some good,  
some distorted, to achieve the sense  
of self which is one of the deepest human needs

As parents and teachers, and also as aunts and uncles, Scout leaders, Sunday School teachers and in any role in which we meet with young people, we are trying to recognize and deal with many young selves. All these young people are seeking to achieve, restore or express a sense of self as acceptable human beings. The sense of self varies a great deal among them. Some of them feel like worthwhile human beings, have confidence in themselves in the spirit of "I'll be your friend and you be mine. You'll enjoy doing things with me because I'm a pretty nice sort, and I'll like your company." But some of them feel like breaking up the other fellow's game, like bullying, scaring, sneering, stealing or slinking off by themselves.

The youngster at all ages is seeking a sense of individuality as a person. The most important aspect of the sense of self is that it refers specifically to a *human* self, a *social* self. This sense of self has nothing in common with biological self-preservation, or membership in a herd. Only a human being can have a sense of self. The distinctive quality of human beings is often forgotten because of apparently parallel behavior in lower species. The lion, we say, is proud, the cat aloof, the snake sneaky. But the lion, though he is statuesque, silent and strong, is still a lion. His external aspect may remind one of a proud man with a dignified bearing, a serious silence and strength of character.

It is the man who can be proud—the lion is simply behaving like a lion. A cat may be unconcerned about us, but only a human being who is unconcerned about other human beings can be *aloof*, for human aloofness implies certain decisions, attitudes and values that have developed specifically out of human social relationships, and that cannot be realistically attributed to a cat. A robin, or a cat or a dog may take excellent care of its offspring. But only a woman or a man can work and plan for the future development of a child, wish for its happiness, consider possible alternatives for its future, reason with or try to persuade the growing child to follow a certain course. Only a woman or a man can feel maternal or paternal.

So we see that the human qualities of pride, aloofness and parental feeling cannot be applied, except humorously or symbolically, to lower animals. Such qualities are uniquely human; and it is to the growing awareness of these unique human characteristics that we refer when we speak of the development of a sense of self.

The child has his real animal patterns besides, of course. He yells when he is hungry or uncomfortable, the way a kitten meows or a puppy yips. He will fight against physical oppression, will run away to escape danger, will respond self-protectively to pain, noise, loss of balance. These things are on a jungle level, a survival level. They are part of the self-protective pattern of all



living creatures. But they have nothing to do with being human, in the social sense in which that word has come to be used. When Johnny says, as he's leaving school, "Hey, guys, let's stop for a coke," he's doing much more than an amoeba contacting a food particle, more than a puppy running for a biscuit. He's doing more than restoring a blood sugar level, more than sustaining his fitness for survival reasons. Johnny is expressing a healthy sense of self in strictly human terms. He's expressing confidence that he's good company for the other fellows, that he's desirable as a friend. He's manifesting a desire for the kind of companionship which only a human youngster can achieve. It is distinctly different from two puppies starting to play together after a preliminary nip or push.

In our efforts to recognize and deal with the needs of youngsters, we find that each child presents an individual problem. Yet to bring some order out of this enormous variety it is useful to think in certain broad categories:

There are the manifestations of a *healthy* sense of self, as, for example, initiative in friendship;

There are the manifestations of a *poorly developed* sense of self, as for example, shyness;

There are the types of behavior which represent *distorted techniques* for establishing a sense of self, such as bullying.

#### **Healthy self-confidence**

In the first category, the criterion in general is a sense of one's own desirability as a friend, a confidence that one is acceptable. This child feels that he will probably be adequate to most of the individual and social demands that will be made on him. He feels that he is loved by his parents, liked by his teachers, liked very much by a number of people. He feels that most people are potentially friends and, when they are not, his reaction isn't "What's the matter with me?" but "What's the matter with *them*?" If such a child is clumsy at a game or any other pursuit, he may think,

"Gee, I'm no good at *that*," but not, "Gee, I'm just no good."

#### **The shy youngster**

The second category of behavior that we observe includes various manifestations of a poorly developed sense of self. Here we see the youngster who is shy, who feels that there is not very much about him that other people might like. It is painful to be spurned, so it is better not to risk examination. Stick to those you're sure of, stick to boys if you're a boy, to girls if you're a girl. Stick to the kids next door, to your own parents, to your own back yard—you sort of fit in automatically there, nobody judges you. Here is the child who is a hanger-on. He trails along. When shoved away, he is crushed. This boy or girl lacks initiative and venturesomeness. His feeling of individuality depends upon success. Each performance is a sort of proxy for himself—success makes him feel like something, failure makes him feel like zero. Since each undertaking is fraught with risk of failure, and consequent reduction to nothingness, this child will try hardly anything. Instead he becomes preoccupied with daydreams, for it is only in dreams that he is a somebody, has a self. He is more secure in fantasy than in performance, where he will be exposed to judgment. This is the child who clings compulsively to comic books and tales of magical prowess. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be so confident, or, even better, to perform successful exploits, like Dick Tracy or Superman?

In trying to help the shy child, it is well to bear in mind that the sense of self is something that grows, becomes more secure and well defined, with every successful experience. The healthier the sense of self, the more readily and fully does the child enter into new activity, the more richly, as a result, does the personality grow. The diffident, frightened, subdued kid with a poorly developed sense of being a human being, tends to find fewer and fewer occasions where participation seems

possible to him. The more undeveloped his sense of self, the less will he risk exposure and activity which will invite the judgment of others and thus threaten to confirm his own worst fears.

The less this shy child dares, the less success in performance does he have and the less growth stimulus is there to his personality. The more he manages to avoid actual practice in group activity, the greater grows his diffidence. He or she is the kid who doesn't want to get out and try dancing. This boy or girl is painfully self-conscious on early dates or at parties, risks little exposure of his personality, and consequently becomes, in reality, dull company. He tends to be excluded, feels more than ever convinced that he lacks something the other boys and girls have, and seeks more and more to hide this lack by staying away from the others. No amount of urging in the world helps this child to mix, to venture with confidence. On the contrary, prodding only increases the youngster's fear that his inadequacy will be exposed. This is the sort of situation which cries out for adult help in skillfully created group activity where everyone joins in, and where individual skill or initiative is unimportant. Here the sense of self may actually find a chance to grow just because the child is lost in the crowd: he is *doing* with others, and the human social self is, in the most natural way, being taken for granted.

#### **Bullying and teasing**

Children whose deficient sense of self is shown in shyness awaken our compassion. In contrast, the group that has developed distorted techniques of establishing a sense of self all too often provoke antagonism and punishment rather than sympathy. While they are less likely to evoke compassion, they are more likely to get attention because the youngsters in this category cause real disturbances. In essence, the sense of self they establish is directly dependent upon the disturbance. It is as though they were saying, "Oh, hear the

splash, see the ripples—I must be quite a big pebble." The disturbance is caused by various operations familiar to all of us, such as bullying, cruelty to animals, teasing, rebellion, stubbornness, tantrums, destructiveness, procrastination, "deafness," forgetfulness and, on a more serious scale, different types of delinquency.

The nuisance-value criterion of self is especially hard to deal with since so often the healthy substitutes we offer the child lack the bang, the convincingness of society's pain reaction. By comparison, harmonious participation is not only dull, but seemingly self-annihilating: if I do not create a stir, then I am nothing. This pattern of behavior is often a reaction to an over-critical environment, where shortcomings are highlighted and accomplishments taken for granted, and where little affection is given to the child except as a reward for good behavior.

#### **A sense of self—willy nilly**

There is a sort of resignation or hopelessness in the child who lives by disturbing. "If you think I'm a brat, a stinker, and nothing more, okay, I'll stick to that. At least there's something *sure* about it." He does not seem to have a self, something that others respond to with pleasure. Half the time he is in the way, and the other half the time he is ignored. But a sense of self must be had, willy nilly. The child who feels a self only when the environment shakes with his activity, will create a disturbance wherever he goes.

There are many variations in this generalized picture of the child who arrives at a sense of self through disturbing the environment. It may be necessary for the child to terrorize, to bully, to see people frightened, worried, bawling, at their wits' end. He may have to be first, to be captain all the time. He may have to rebel against coercion, refuse to do anything expected of him, insist on doing everything that's forbidden. Actually, even the shy child may use his or her shyness as a subtle technique for creating a disturbance.

Of course we want to do everything possible to help our children develop a healthy sense of self. Sometimes we are misguided in our efforts and, with apparently good intentions, interfere with such development. The process of development of a new skill can be so shaped for the child that he feels it as a coercion rather than as a gratifying achievement. For instance, this may be true at an early stage of life in the development of bladder and bowel control. It may exist also in later, more intricate aspects of the child's growth, where the coercive methods are not so readily detectable. It may, for example, be important to the intellectually ambitious mother that Jane should paint, love books and excel in English. Mother subtly presses or cajoles Jane into intellectual efforts that Jane would happily pursue quite independently of her mother's manipulations. The covert pressure tends toward the cultivation of anxious efforts, and Jane's *spontaneous* interest in books and painting withers as she strives for high marks in Art and English. The subtle coercions develop a good daughter, Jane, the product of her mother's shaping; whereas spontaneous endeavors would have led to a person with a genuine sense of self, a Jane who had real interests and expanding capacities. In the latter case, she would not have been deprived of the enjoyment of her mother's approval, but would have added this to her own greater enjoyment of the activity itself, and to her more authentic satisfaction in the achievement.

#### ***Pleasure in growing up***

The approval-disapproval approach to a child's development is based fundamentally on the premise that the child does not want to grow up, integrate socially and broaden his independence. There has been too much emphasis on how much it hurts a child to grow up. More attention should be directed to the child's pleasure in growing up, to his capacities and desires for rich and varied social experience. As children master various steps in growing up, they tend to

achieve a healthy sense of self. Bladder and bowel control can be happy achievements. Muscular skills, group play, intellectual skills, social skills, cooperative activities of many types are all the bases for the development of a healthy sense of self. Opportunity must be afforded, not forced, for such development, and plenty of affectionate recognition given to achievement of normal skills.

Parents may feel lost without the approval-disapproval technique, and wonder what there is to substitute. We can express our joy, rather than mere approval, over the child's successes. And we can show our compassion over his failures. We can say, "I'm glad you had a good time at the party," or "You were miserable? They said you were a poor sport? What do you suppose went wrong?" Rejoicing in appropriate fashion with the child when he's glad about success, showing compassion when he is unhappy because of failure, emphasizes his independence and supports his effort to achieve a healthy sense of self.

#### **New staff member**

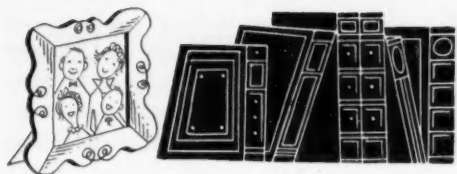
The CSAA is pleased to announce the addition of Mrs. Clara Lyndon, formerly Director, Counseling and Guidance Service of the Merrill-Palmer School in Detroit, to the staff of its program for training professional workers for leadership of parent groups. Mrs. Lyndon, who will be serving on a part-time basis, has had wide experience in social work and parent education, both directly and in the training and supervision of other workers.

#### **Children's Christmas book**

In time for Christmas sales in department stores, the Whitman Publishing Company has brought out a new anthology selected by the Children's Book Committee of CSAA, entitled *The Christmas Book*. This 384 page book is popularly priced at 69¢. It is *not* available by mail from CSAA.

#### **Grant to CSAA**

The New York State Department of Health has made an additional grant available to the Child Study Association of America for analysis and evaluation of the current program of training public health nurses in the leading of discussion groups. An advisory committee is directing the work of the two research specialists who are working on this project.



## Book reviews

### How to Get Along with Children

By Frank Howard Richardson, M.D.

Atlanta: Tupper & Love, 1954. \$2.95.

In this short volume, Dr. Richardson covers well over a hundred subjects from thumb sucking to narcotics and from cowardice and bad language to sex education and the training of the emotions. Most topics are covered in one or two paragraphs, some in a few sentences. The result is that many of the most complex problems of human growth are handled superficially. Dr. Richardson also has a tendency to arrive at breezy and dogmatic solutions. For instance:

"Question: what should I do if I ever caught my son masturbating?"

"Answer: . . . Instead of catching him the wise father will . . . let his son know that he is aware that every normal boy makes this discovery by accident or is told by someone else. Every boy knows that it is something he ought not to do . . . His father can help him break this habit if he will explain . . . that while it is not much more serious than thumbsucking, unless he keeps it up, it is something the right kind of people just don't do . . ."

Or on stealing —

". . . Much more convincing in teaching him honesty is the best policy and that crime doesn't pay is the certain knowledge that he can't get away with anything, no matter how he tries . . . More effective than a slap or a spanking is knowing that he will have to tell the shopgirl why he is giving her a nickel out of his allowance, to

pay for the candy he picked off the counter . . ."

This kind of advice does not seem to get at essentials and may even be seriously misleading to the parent trying to cope with a complicated situation in his child's life or behavior.

EDA J. LESHAN

for the Bibliography Committee

### The Early Years of Life. A Psychoanalytic Study

By Alice Balint.

New York: Basic Books, 1954. \$3.00.

Despite the fact that this tiny volume of 145 pages was first published over twenty years ago (originally in Hungarian, the author's mother tongue), its basic point of view is still valid today. Alice Balint studied psychoanalysis under Sander Ferenczi and Hanns Sachs and was one of the early pioneers in applying the concepts of this new science to problems of child rearing.

The book deals mainly with the instinctual drives of the child from infancy through the nursery years, and the conflicts with which the child struggles as his instincts become educated and he learns to adapt to the real world around him. Although presenting psychoanalytical material, the author uses a minimum of technical language. The theoretical portions, simply stated, are further clarified by many examples from children's conversations which reveal the kinds of conflicts and fears found in the child's fantasy life at various stages of his growth. In a skillful and subtle way, Alice Balint suggests how parents, through understanding and recognition of their child's inner struggles, can help him to realize that the sacrifices he makes for them are worthwhile.

The easy style in which this small classic is written should make it rewarding reading for parents who are already familiar with these concepts and who wish to deepen their psychological insights.

HELENE S. ARNSTEIN

for the Bibliography Committee



# Parents speaking—

In this new department, Child Study hopes to present, from time to time, reactions—straight from the parent's pen—to problems and interests shared by many families today

## *Can we help our children grow up without prejudice?*

By Frances P. Simsarian

"I don't want my children to grow up feeling the way I did about people of other races and religions. My parents were Orthodox Jews and I was always taught not to bother gentiles. I was told that gentiles don't like us and we should leave them alone," said one mother.

"My experience was very different," said another member of the group, "I don't believe my family felt any prejudice. I grew up in an apartment in New York City. Many different kinds of people lived in that apartment. When we celebrated our Jewish holidays my mother always invited the other children in to have some of our special holiday food. I went to play with the children in other families, too."

Another mother had had a similar experience. "My father runs a store in a poor neighborhood. I grew up playing with all of the children that came into that store. I don't recall any prejudice against us because we were Jewish nor any prejudice against the Negro children. I played with everybody. But as I think of it now, it is strange that I don't like to take my children to play around my father's store. The children there look dirty to me and I am afraid that my children will catch something."

Thus we tackled a discussion of the question, how can we help our children to grow up free from prejudice? We were a group that knew one another pretty well. We had met every other week for a full

season and discussed many aspects of our relationships to our children. We had become used to frankness and to saying what we thought for its usefulness to ourselves and others. Some of us were neighbors. All the members of the group lived in a new, middle-class, suburban community, located in a Southern area where segregation was the tradition. The discussion took place before the recent Supreme Court decision on segregation in the schools.

It was not unusual for us to begin a discussion as we began this one—by analyzing our own experiences. We had learned that by taking a careful look at our own childhoods, we were better able to think creatively about the kinds of experiences we hoped to offer our children today. Also, in any discussion we seemed better able to go ahead fruitfully after we had placed one another in respect to point of view. It was particularly true with this discussion of prejudice. And surprisingly quickly we realized that we all wanted much the same thing for our children: that they grow up free of prejudice against people of other nationalities and religions.

"I grew up on the West coast where we always looked down on Japanese and Mexican people. My mother never bought from a Japanese fruit and vegetable seller because she considered all Japanese people dirty. But when I went away to college I soon became very good friends with a Japanese girl."



This led us to discuss the economic and social aspects of prejudice, and to recognize the fact that communities are often prejudiced against certain groups because they offer some economic competition. We talked about how easy it is in any community, such as the one in which our children are growing up, to get racial and class prejudices mixed up. For example, our contacts with white people are with people of our own approximate standards of living, whereas we usually see only those Negroes whose living standard is different.

From this point there was pretty general agreement that the big hurdle lay in learning to think of people as people and avoiding the error of classifying them because of race or religion. We realized that there are people from all racial and religious groups whose personal attributes or manners may be unattractive to us.

There came a point then in the discussion where it all seemed to look so easy. We seemed to feel that we understood a bit more how damaging it had been to us if we had grown up in families where we had been taught prejudice; we recognized the lack of logic in prejudice. Several mothers spoke of how much progress has been made. "If we had lived a generation ago," they said, "would we even have wanted our children to be non-prejudiced?" The fact that we are aware of prejudice and talk about it is important." And one mother added, "I don't think that the kind of prejudice some of us knew as children exists any more. It's taken for granted on our street that Protestant children may

participate in some of the Jewish holidays and that Jewish children will take part in Christmas and Easter." For a few minutes it looked as if the battle were won, or nearly won.

But we were quickly shaken out of any possible complacency at the next meeting when one member told us, "We entertained a Negro couple in our home and since then our next door neighbors have not spoken to us."

There was nothing complacent about the discussion during the next few minutes. The first speaker argued, with support from others, that she would stick by her right to entertain her friends whether white, black or yellow in her own home and if neighbors turned against her, her child would just have to understand. She wasn't particularly interested in being friendly with such prejudiced people anyway. The opposing side argued that one might be able to feel and act that way before one had children but that it is important for children to feel accepted in their community and that therefore parents have a responsibility to conform to the general pattern. "But how far does this conforming have to go anyway?" came the question. "Does one lose the right to think and act for himself when he has children and moves into a suburban community?"

Perhaps it was a good thing that we were not allowed to continue with these almost unanswerable questions too long. One mother brought us back with the comment that we should not let ourselves think that it would be easy for us as parents to know



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what to do. She told of working with a group of parents interested in developing a neighborhood swimming pool and of how there had been discussion of ways and means of keeping Negroes from using the pool without an outright exclusion. "I personally would like to see Negroes using the pool, yet I have not said anything during the discussions. I suppose I am afraid to say what I really think."

Once again there was a sharp cleavage in the group. One would probably find in any group tackling any social issue that some people would advocate a head-on, trumpets-blaring approach while others would feel that a slower approach is more desirable, with emphasis upon education. In a sense our discussion tended toward the latter point of view. In any event, we talked about what would be practical for our community, and for us as mothers. We felt that we could do much more than we had been doing to give our children opportunities to meet people of different races and cultures and that we should take responsibility for doing this ourselves and not just leave everything to the schools. Possibly a Scouting or Sunday School group, an athletic meet or an art exhibit would give us a chance to help our children make these contacts with other cultural and racial groups.

We agreed that we would have to be aware of other peoples' feelings. Would any real good have come from taking issue with a prejudiced group on the swimming pool question, or would it just have started a landslide of bitter, angry discussion? Although some still insisted that one should not be intimidated and should be forthright in opinion and action, others looked for a middle way.

Then the discussion took another turn, when someone remarked, "We have just talked about racial and religious prejudices, but I think we have lots of prejudices against people who are different from ourselves in other ways."

"Yes, I know I have a lot," said another mother. "I'm prejudiced against women

who go around the house looking sloppy all day."

"And I think that perhaps our most harmful prejudices are the ones we don't know we have. I am prejudiced, I think, against women who work. I don't mind supervising other children playing in my yard, but I find myself getting very annoyed with some children whose mother works. It is not that the children are more bothersome, but simply that I feel: 'why should I be watching her children?'"

After this discussion, we came back to the question of group prejudices when one mother asked what to do about the name-calling that children often indulge in—dirty Jew or nigger, for instance. "I don't think that you should make a big issue of it," came the answer. "Children use names toward one another so much, I don't think that they really know what they are saying." This point of view prevailed in the group; but we felt that an effort should be made to handle the situation frankly. A response such as, "Yes, Stevie goes to the Jewish synagogue to church, but I don't see how that makes him dirty," might meet the child at his own level without making a mountain out of what was essentially a molehill. Similarly a comment to the effect, "Yes, Mary has black skin; she is a Negro," might be adequate. Older children might be told more about different cultures and the proper names for the races.

And here we adjourned our discussion, but as one mother later said, "I went home and discussed with my husband until 2 A.M., and am still discussing."

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## Books of the year for children

Selected by the Children's Book Committee of the Child Study Association

*These titles have been selected from the children's books published during the calendar year 1954. For convenience they have been arranged in age groupings, but many have a far wider appeal than could be indicated. Books of outstanding quality are starred (\*). Titles designated (+) are books which illuminate today's world for children.*

This list can be purchased from the Association for 25c. All the books listed are on exhibit at Association headquarters, 132 East 74th St., N.Y.C.



### Collections

\***READ-TO-YOURSELF STORYBOOK.** Compiled by the Child Study Association of America. Illus. by Leonard Shortall. Crowell. \$2.50. Modern stories by well-loved authors, full of fun and interest, especially selected for their readability and appeal to young readers. (8-11)

**CIRCUS PARADE: *Stories of the Big Top.*** Selected by Phyllis R. Fenner. Illus. by Lee Ames. Knopf. \$3. The excitement, fun and drama of tanbark and canvas top vividly recreated by outstanding writers. (9-12)

**SPEED, SPEED, SPEED.** Selected by Phyllis R. Fenner. Watts. \$3. Thrilling adventures in cars, planes, jets, submarines and motor boats. (11 and over)

\***THE FIRST BOOK OF POETRY.** Selected by Isabel J. Peterson. Illus. by Kathleen Elgin. Watts. \$1.75. A fine collection of verse in many moods for many children; with imaginative illustrations. (7 and over)

### Christmas

**THE LITTLE FIR TREE.** By Margaret Wise Brown. Illus. by Barbara Cooney. Crowell. \$2. Enchanting pictures make this beautiful story memorable for Christmas reading. (4-8)

**THE TALL BOOK OF CHRISTMAS.** Selected by Dorothy Hall Smith. Illus. by Gertrude Eliot Espenscheid. Harper. \$1. A varied collection of stories and verse, modern and traditional. (6-10)

\***THE CHRISTMAS BOOK.** Compiled by the Child Study Association of America. Illus. by Roberta Paffin. Whitman. 69¢. Rich treasury of stories, poems, holiday activities and recipes for a happy family Christmas, at a surprisingly low price. (6-10)

\***THE HIGH WORLD.** Written and illus. by Ludwig Bemelmans. Harper. \$2.75. The Christmas peace of a Tyrolean hunter and his family is

disrupted by a government official with startling results. Embellished by the author-artist's inimitable pictures. (10 and over)

**THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.** By Clement C. Moore. Illus. by Roger Duvoisin. Garden City. \$1.50. This favorite poem presented in arresting format and striking pictures for today's children. (ageless)

**CAROLS FOR THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS.** Compiled and arranged by Percy M. Young. Illus. by Ida Procter. Roy. \$3.50. Lovely carols, illuminating comments, easy arrangements and attractive illustrations make this a family book to be cherished.

### For the youngest: under five

\***LAVENDER'S BLUE.** Compiled by Kathleen Lines. Illus. by Harold Jones. Watts. \$6. A full and delightful collection of English nursery rhymes, profusely and happily illustrated. A nursery treasure.

**BOOK OF NURSERY AND MOTHER GOOSE RHYMES.** Collected and illus. by Marguerite de Angeli. Doubleday. \$5. A large, handsome Mother Goose for all the children as they grow up. Delicate illustrations.

**WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE BABY.** By Rhoda Berman. Illus. by Mariana. Lothrop. \$2. Appealing pictures and text tell the toddler about his baby doings.

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**OVER THE HILLS TO BALLYBOG.** By Mabel Watts. Illus. by Henry C. Pitz. Aladdin. \$2. Irish folk flavor in this amusing tale of Mr. Brogan's helpfulness to his neighbors.

\***THE WAR WHOOP OF THE WILY IROQUOIS.** By Martha Keller. Illus. by Richard Powers. Coward-McCann. \$2. Exciting tale of an Indian raid told with rare flavor, inviting young listeners to participate in war whoops.

**THE LOUDEST NOISE IN THE WORLD.** By Benjamin Elkin. Illus. by James Daugherty. Viking. \$2.50. How quiet came to the city of Hub-Bub to the surprised delight of the young prince, told in ebullient pictures and text.

**EASTER TREAT.** Written and illus. by Roger Duvoisin. Knopf. \$2. Santa Claus, incognito, descends upon New York with pleasurable consequences in an amusing picture-story with an original twist.

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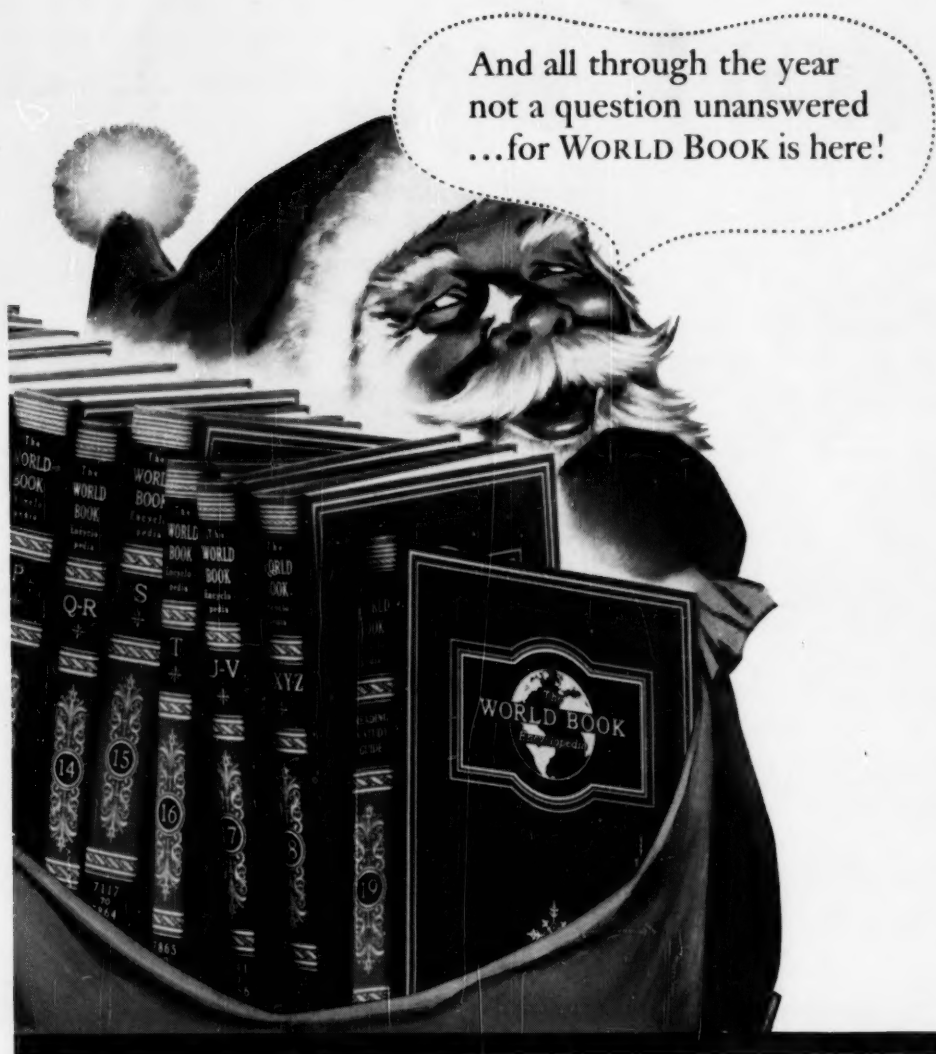
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